

Green Building

FLORIDA 'LEEDs' THE WAY

by Belinda Bacon

History shows that change often follows government's lead or government's regulation requiring innovation. With growing environmental concerns, Florida's government is engaging the construction industry in designing and building more environmentally-friendly "sustainable buildings" for the State's use; a trend that may spread to the private sector in the future. With current economic conditions, new construction projects are not as prevalent as in the past, but the construction industry might soon be presented with more business opportunities in the public sector with the promised federal stimulus package. To take advantage of those new public sector opportunities, however, construction companies will need to be familiar with the new environmental requirements for Florida's public buildings.

In fact, after July 1, 2008, all public buildings must be designed to be "sustainable buildings." To measure "sustainability," Florida has chosen the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system standards, the Green Building Initiative Green Globes rating system, the Florida Green Building Coalition standards, or their equivalent. Florida is also applying sustainability initiatives for the renovation of existing State buildings.

■ **LEED savings:** LEED certified or equivalent buildings are not only more environmentally friendly, but they will also save the State money in the long-term. Over time, energy and other cost-savings will more than off-set the additional capital outlay which might be involved in developing new sustainable buildings or renovating existing facilities. The State was apparently on-board with this idea even back in 1994 when the government, through Florida Statute §489.145, set up a way to reward contractors who could guarantee energy performance savings for the State.

■ **Expansion of guaranteed performance savings contracts:** Those §489.145 contracts now include opportunities for contractors who can guarantee the State a way to save water or reduce sewer charges, for example. As part of such efforts, each State agency occupying space within buildings owned by the State or managed by the State's Department of Management Services (DMS) is now required to compile a list of projects suitable for guaranteed performance contracts. These lists had to be submitted to DMS by December 31, 2008, which DMS will prioritize and develop a schedule to complete the improvements.

■ **LEED training:** So, how does a contractor learn about constructing sustainable buildings? One way is to take LEED-related courses. Many of them are available both live and on-line. Some courses are



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sponsored by the USGBC and others by private organizations. For example, St. Petersburg College may be working with the construction industry to develop an online continuing education curriculum for builders that construct energy-efficient and sustainable public sector buildings. The USGBC has even created the designation of LEED Accredited Professional as a way to distinguish those with particular knowledge of the USGBC's standards¹. LEED Accredited Professionals are accredited by and listed on-line with the Green Building Certification Institute at www.gbci.org.

The goal of promoting environmentally-friendly and sustainable buildings is not only admirable, but is also economically sensible. As with any new construction technique there may be potential complications that must be addressed, but with careful planning, those issues can be managed in the same way that traditional building methods have been refined. Florida, through new legislation, has demonstrated true governmental leadership—"LEED"ing the way and giving incentives to those in the construction industry to provide more environmentally-friendly and sustainable buildings. In the short-term, with promised federal funding, public projects in this trend will provide much needed business opportunities, in a time when construction projects are otherwise in short supply. In the long-term, contractors who acquire expertise in constructing sustainable buildings will not only have an advantage in procuring future public projects, but will also be able to capitalize on the trend if the movement spreads to the private sector.

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